



## **Annual Report 2020**

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Xavier Albe has retired in summer 2020 and Barbara Imfeld has taken over the agendas of the EQALM Office Liaison.

## EQALM member organizations

|                              | Termination | 2020<br>New | N         |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| <b>Full European members</b> | 1           | 2           | 41        |
| <b>Non- European members</b> |             |             | 5         |
| <b>Associated members</b>    |             |             | 8         |
| <b>Individual members</b>    |             | 2           | 6         |
| <b>Honorary members</b>      |             |             | 4         |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>1</b>    | <b>4</b>    | <b>64</b> |

The recent listing of EQALM members can be seen at <http://www.eqalm.org/site/member.php>.

## Executive Board

Executive board 2020:

- Stéphanie Albarède (treasurer) (2017-2019, 2020-2022)
- Christoph Buchta (chair) (2018-2020, re-elected for 2021-2023)
- Gitte Marie Henriksen (member) (2020-2022)
- Rachel Marrington (secretary) (2020-2022)
- Piet Meijer (member, chair of the scientific committee) (2016-2018, 2019-2021)

## EQALM Symposium and General Assembly

The annual EQALM symposium was cancelled in 2020 to adverse circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. For the same reason, there was no General Assembly in this year in the presence of representatives of all member organizations. In order to meet the requirement to hold an annual General Assembly in which members make decisions, the executive board has decided for this year to summarize all the items that are usually presented and discussed at the General Assembly and the

related votes in a document that was presented to member organizations. A total of 13 votes have been received and the voting results were presented to EQALM member organizations on December 28<sup>th</sup>. The minutes of the General Assembly 2019 were approved as were the members of the Executive Board and their functions. Accounts for 2019, provisional budget for 2021 and membership fees for 2021 were approved by the General Assembly.

## EQALM Cooperation with other organizations:

- **EEE** (Stéphanie Albarède, Erika Sarkani, Anne Stavelin)  
The EA-EUROLAB-EURACHEM Working Group „Proficiency Testing in Accreditation“ (EEE-PT) had a virtual meeting in May 2020. The Leaflet on ‘Proficiency testing schemes for sampling’ is being finalized. The WG is working on the revision of the following documents:
  - Eurachem PT guide - Selection, Use and Interpretation of Proficiency Testing (PT) Schemes
  - Revision of EA-4/18 - Guidance on the level and frequency of proficiency testing participation

- **EFLM - WG POST** (Piet Meijer)  
There is one ongoing project which will be finalised this year. It is the APTT Mixing Study project. The data analysis has been completed. The analytical feedback report is ready and will be sent out soon to the participants. The feedback report on the interpretative comments is in preparation. Also two publications on this study are in preparation. There have been two new projects this year:

[1] *Survey on Reflex/Reflective Testing in Clinical Chemistry and Endocrinology laboratories*. This has been written and is undergoing testing. The aim is to distribute to European Laboratories in October/November 2020 via national EQA organisations and other professional bodies.

[2] *LabReport 2.0 Project*. A review of the literature on laboratory reports has been performed. A manuscript has been written and submitted for publication. An experimental study is being designed looking at the efficiency and efficacy of different formats of laboratory reports.

- **EFLM Working Group on Preanalytical Phase** (Barbara De la Salle, Gunn BB Kristensen)  
**Working group meeting in Paris 24.03.20** with focus on planning the 2021 Pre-analytical conference in Zagreb (March 2021) – postponed 24.02.20 due to development of coronavirus in Europe.

**Zoom meeting 7.07.20** where the following topics were discussed:

- Demand management
- Sampling time

- Sample stability project
- Blood catheter project
- Project on needle caliber
- WG-Pre Conference 2021 Zagreb; program and future plans - Spring 2022 may represent a suitable choice or hold the conference as online conference

**WG-Pre Conference 2021 Zagreb postponed to spring 2022** - This was decided after email discussion among the WG-PRE members during Autumn 2020.

**Stability paper published in CCLM online 25.06.20:** The CRESS checklist for reporting stability studies: on behalf of the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) Working Group for the Preanalytical Phase (WG-PRE) Volume 59 (2021): Issue 1 (Jan 2021)

- **ICHCLR** (Gitte Henriksen)

In 2019 EQALM and the International Consortium for Harmonization of Clinical Laboratory Results (ICHCLR) signed a memorandum of understanding to collaborate in the pilot activity with the intent to form a more formal joint task force to extend the work to a broader number of EQA providers and measurands.

At the EQALM symposium in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2019 Sverre Sandberg and Eline van der Hagen gave a presentation of progress and challenges “Harmonisation and traceability: a global effort - A joint project between ICHCLR and EQALM”.

In 2020 a manuscript was published: Feasibility for aggregation of commutable external quality assessment results to evaluate metrological traceability and agreement among results. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cclm-2020-0736>.

EQALM has again been asked by Greg Miller, Chair of the Harmonization Oversight Group of ICHCLR whether EQALM wants to continue this activity and the board has accepted and appointed Gitte Henriksen as representative from the EQALM board.

- **ISO/CASCO** (Stéphanie Albarède)

EQALM was accepted for a C-Liaison with CASCO WG57 and is represented by Stéphanie Albarède.

A first meeting of the EQALM TFG on ISO 17043 revision was organized in 2020. The TFG analyzed the results of the survey carried out among EQALM members and drew a list of modifications for the standard to be proposed. Some of these proposals were discussed at the ISO/CASCO first working session for the revision of the standard ISO 17043 from September 14 to 17, 2020.

But as at this session a first new version of the revised standard, very different from the 2010 version, was presented. So, the EQALM TFG had to redefine his list of proposals. The ISO/CASCO sent a form to each organization involved in the WG57 to collect remarks on the version issued from the first meeting of WG57 (deadline = 15th of December). In order to fill

it, a meeting of the TFG has been organised on the 7th of December to analyse this new version. As volunteer, EQALM will participate in January 2021 at the analyse of the whole comments from the different countries.

## Activities with EQALM participation

2020 was the year of cancelled meetings and conferences; therefore there is only one attendance to report, which was Piet Meijer's presentation "A Review of European EQA in Laboratory Medicine" at the Conference of China National Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment (CNAS) on June 13<sup>th</sup>.

The second event was the online symposium "Standardization of Laboratory Medicine assays" in cooperation with BIPM (Bureau International des Poids et Mesures at Paris) and Trace LabMed project of EURAMET (The European Association of National Metrology Institutes) and EQALM. This symposium was held on October 16<sup>th</sup> at the annual (and in this year virtual) Meeting of the Greek Society of Clinical Biochemistry.

## Report from the Scientific Committee and Working Groups

The Scientific Committee had 4 telephone conferences in 2020. The major topics discussed within the SC were the continuation of the Working Group on Microbiology, the succession of the chairperson of the Working Group on Haematology and the development of a central EQALM database for EQA data collection and evaluation. The purpose of this database project is to collect EQA data from different providers for overall analysis. Since the board of EQALM has decided to implement such a database a pilot project in the field of haematology will be started.

Also the progress of ongoing projects within the working groups has been discussed.

(Piet Meijer)

### Frequency (Wim Coucke)

A study was performed investigating the role of correlation between EQA data obtained by the same laboratories for different samples in determining optimal frequency. It was found that it reducing the number of samples may have a beneficial effect. There is no evidence that a frequency of a survey every two weeks would be too frequent.

### Haematology (Joan-Luis Vives Corrons, Stéphanie Albarède, Barabra De la Salle)

Two new works were proposed at the meeting in Ljubljana in 2019 (survey on Reference Ranges used in Hematology and post-analytical EQA). This two works are postponed in 2021 due to the disruption

of everyone's schedules by the current pandemic. However, the steering committee did not remain inactive in 2020. He participated all along the year in the project EQALM Virtual Microscopy Sharing Platform as the pilot operation will concern the differentiation of leukocytes on blood smears.

Concerning the European pilot survey on PK Deficiency pilot: There have been two distributions (1 in 2018 and 1 in 2019), as presented in Ljubljana in 2019. UK NEQAS Haematology had planned a further two distributions in 2020 but these have been delayed because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the EQA staff, the courier services and the participant laboratories. The organisers have started plans to send a survey in 2020 and another early in 2021. They have worked with the EuroBloodNet project to develop a questionnaire on the diagnosis and management of PK deficiency and hope that additional testing sites can be recruited through the EuroBloodNet project.

### **Microbiology** (Sanjiv Rughooputh)

The board of EQALM has decided to continue the Working Group on Microbiology. The new chairperson for this working group will be Dr Sanjiv Rughooputh from the UKNEQAS for Microbiology.

### **Virtual Microscopy** (Istvan Juhos)

- Surveys  
VM WG steering committee created a Blood Smear VM Scheme standard proposal for a review for WG members in a survey.
- Talks  
No symposium is held this year.
- Activity  
6 members participated in VM WG Steering committee meetings this year, discussing ongoing WG projects:
  - Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, UK
- Projects  
WG steering committee has created a Blood Smear VM Scheme proposal in cooperation with the Haematology WG. The proposal is under review by the WG members in order to finalize it. EQALM VM Sharing Platform has been started with the WG steering committee, then pilot participants will be extended for the WG and for the Scientific Committee. Building virtual microscope image database for the pilot has been started by the support of the WG steering committee.
- Scientific activity  
WG steering committee has started to collect references and scientific bibliography for reports and papers about ongoing projects.

### **Haemostasis** (Ann Helen Kristoffersen)

So far in 2020 the major focus was on a questionnaire regarding HIL indices (haemolysis, icterus and lipemia). A questionnaire was sent out to EQA organisations to make an inventory about current available EQA programmes for HIL indices in blood coagulation. Currently a questionnaire on HIL indices for coagulation laboratories is in preparation. The preparation of this questionnaire will be finalized in November 2020. It is expected to send this out to laboratories early 2021.

### **Performance Specifications** (Dalius Vitkus)

Activities of the Working Group Performance Specifications in 2020 were very limited due to COVID-19 crisis. Terms of Reference were setup In January. Suggestions for the questionnaire to be prepared and distributed to EQALM members on Performance Specifications have been discussed during January meeting of the Scientific Committee. It was planned to prepare questionnaire by the end of March. Unfortunately only pre-draft has been set up which is planned to be finalised by the end of the year.

## **Task and Finish Groups**

### **Immunohaematology** (established in 2018, chaired by Christoph Buchta)

The Immunohaematology Task and Finish Group proceeded with collection of data and relevant information for the study. The aim of this study is to evaluate differences in error rates in immunohaematology EQA in relation to presence or absence of several factors of interest, which are national regulatory and economic conditions in home countries of participant laboratories and specific features of EQA schemes and providers.

This study includes 26 participating EQA organizations, which have provided results obtained by about 10.000 laboratories in more than 70 countries worldwide between 2004 and 2019.

Data base has been closed and data evaluation started in 2020. However, - as in so many areas - the impact of Covid-19 pandemic caused delay in the data evaluation process. For 2021, we plan the completion of the evaluation and publication of the results.

### **Immunology** (established in 2019, chaired by Dina Patel)

The aim of the Immunology Task and Finish Group is to collaborate with other EQALM members to try to understand how immunology practices/tests are utilised within member countries in the following areas:

- ANA ICAP harmonisation and nomenclature initiative
- ANCA-best practice following the release of updated guidelines

-Phospholipid antibodies- challenges with standardisation of assays

As an initial starting point we met via teleconference on 9th March 2020 to decide on the terms of reference of the group. We decided to produce a survey that would be circulated to EQALM members to determine the impact of the ANA ICAP harmonisation initiative and whether changes in technology are reducing or improving skills within the workforce of immunofluorescence testing. Unfortunately no further progress has been made due to the limitations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to continue our work in preparing the survey and then circulate it to members in 2021.

**ISO 17043 revision** (established in 2019, chaired by Stéphanie Albarède)

See above, EQALM Cooperation with other organizations.

**Performance of laboratories and EQA providers during Covid-19 pandemic** (established in 2020, chaired by Rachel Marrington and Paola Pezzati)

EQALM have conducted two studies related to the Covid-19 pandemic:

- (1) Study on Analytical Performance
- (2) Study on EQA Provision

The first study is using EQA data to look at the quality of medical laboratories during a stressful situation, like that caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, to see if there has been an impact on the response rate (proportion of returned results for EQA specimens) and success rate (proportion of participants with results within acceptable limits) for a range of laboratory analytes. The analytes covered included automated analyses, labour intensive examinations and Point of Care Testing. Data will be reviewed from 2020, compared to that reported in 2019.

The second study looks at how EQA providers and their participants reacted to the pandemic. A series of questions were prepared for EQALM members to respond to using SurveyMonkey. The main purpose was to look to see if there can be any lessons learned and shared for the benefit of all EQALM members.

Both studies are due to report in the first half of 2021.